

FOR WHOM IS THE GOSPEL MEANT? NO. 1345

**A SERMON
DELIVERED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING, MARCH 25, 1877,
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AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.**

*“They that are whole have no need of the physician, but they that are sick:
I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.”*
Mark 2:17.

“Christ died for the ungodly.”
Romans 5:6.

*“God commends His love toward us, in that, while we were
yet sinners, Christ died for us.”*
Romans 5:8.

*“This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptance, that
Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners.”*
1 Timothy 1:15.

LAST Thursday evening, with considerable difficulty, I stood here to preach the gospel of Jesus Christ and I handled one of the simplest imaginable texts, full of nothing but the very plainest elements of the gospel. Within a very few minutes I had a harvest for the sermon. The congregation was slender, for you know how ill a night it was, and how little you expected that your pastor would be able to preach, but three souls came forward uninvited to acknowledge that they had found peace with God. How many more there were I do not know, but these three sought out the brethren and bore a good and hearty confession to the blessed fact that for the first time in their lives they had understood the plan of salvation. Now, it seemed to me that if a plain gospel theme was so promptly profitable, I had better keep to the like subjects. If a farmer finds that a certain seed has paid him so well that he never had a better crop, then he will keep to that seed and sow more of it. Those processes of husbandry which have been successful should be persevered in and even used upon a larger scale. So this morning I shall just preach the A B C of the gospel, the first rudiments of the art of salvation, and I thank God this will be no new thing to me. May God the Holy Spirit, in answer to your prayers, grant us a reward this morning after the same proportion as last Thursday and if so, our heart will be exceeding glad.

Out of a very great number I have selected the four texts which I have read to set forth the truth that the mission of our Lord related to sinners. What did Christ come into the world for? For whom did He come? These are questions of the greatest importance and they are clearly answered in Scripture. When the children of Israel first found manna outside the camp, they said to one another, “Manna?” or, “What is it?” for they knew not what it was. There it lay, a small round thing, as small as the hoar frost upon the ground. No doubt they looked at it and rubbed it in their hands and smelled it, but how glad they were when Moses said, “This is the bread which the Lord has given you to eat.” It was not long before they put the good news to the test, for each man gathered his arms full and took it home and prepared it according to his liking. Now, concerning the gospel, there are many who might call out, “Manna?” for they know not what it is. Very frequently too they make a mistake as to its bearings and its objects, dreaming that it is a kind of improved law or an easier system of salvation by works and therefore they err also in their idea of the persons for whom it is designed. They imagine that surely the blessings of salvation must be meant for deserving persons and Christ must be the Redeemer of the meritorious. On the principle of, “good for the good,” they infer that grace is for the excellent and Christ for the virtuous. Hence it is a most useful thing for us continually to be reminding men what the gospel is and for whom it is sent into the world, for, though the great mass of you know full well and do not need to be told, yet there are multitudes around us who persist in grave mistakes and need to be instructed over and over

again in the very simplest of the doctrines of grace. There is less need for laborious explanations of profound mysteries than for simple explanations of plain truths. Many men need only a simple latchkey to lift the latch and open the door of faith—and such a key, I hope God's infinite mercy may put into their hands this morning. Our business is to show that the gospel is intended for sinners, that it has an eye to guilty persons, that it is not sent into the world as a reward for the good and for the excellent or for those who think they have any measure of fitness or preparation for the divine favor, but that it is intended for law breakers, for the undeserving, for the ungodly, for those who have gone astray like lost sheep, or left their father's house like the prodigal. Christ died to save sinners and He justifies the ungodly. This truth is plain enough in the Word, but since the human heart kicks against it, we will the more earnestly insist upon it.

I. First, EVEN A SUPERFICIAL GLANCE AT OUR LORD'S MISSION SUFFICES TO SHOW THAT HIS WORK WAS FOR THE SINFUL. For, dear brethren, *the descent of the Son of God into this world as a Savior* implied that men needed to be delivered from a great evil by a divine hand. The coming of a Savior, who should by His death provide pardon for human sin, supposed men to be greatly guilty and to be incapable of procuring pardon by any doings of their own. You would never have seen a Savior if there had not been a fall. Eden's withering was a necessary preface to Gethsemane's groaning.

You would never have heard of a cross and a bleeding Savior on it if you had not first heard of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil and of a disobedient hand which plucked the forbidden fruit. If the mission of our Lord did not refer to the guilty, it was an unnecessary errand altogether as far as we can see. What justifies the incarnation except man's ruin? What explains our Lord's suffering life but man's guilt? Above all, what explains His death and the cloud under which He died but human sin? "All we like sheep have gone astray, and the Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all"—that is the answer to an otherwise unanswerable riddle.

If we give a glance at the *covenant under which our Lord came*, we soon perceive that its bearing is towards guilty men. The blessing of the covenant of works has to do with men who are innocent and to them it promises great blessings. If there had been salvation by works, it would have been by the law, for the law is upright and just and good. But the new covenant evidently deals with sinners, for it does not speak of the reward of merit, but it freely promises, "I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and their iniquities will I remember no more." If there had been no sins and iniquities, and no unrighteousness, then there had been no need of the covenant of grace, of which Christ is the Messenger and the Ambassador. The slightest glimpse at our Lord's official character as the Adam of a new covenant should suffice to convince us that His errand is to guilty men. Moses comes to show how the holy should behave, but Jesus comes to reveal how the unholy may be cleansed.

Whenever we hear the mission of Christ spoken of, it is described as one of *mercy and of grace*. In the redemption which is in Christ Jesus, it is always the mercy of God that is extolled—according to His mercy, He saved us. He, for Christ's sake, according to His abundant mercy, forgives us our trespasses. "The law was given by Moses, but grace and truth by Jesus Christ." "The grace of God, and the gift by grace, which is by one man, Jesus Christ, has abounded unto many." The apostle Paul, who most fully expounds the gospel, makes grace to be the one word upon which he rings the changes, "Where sin abounded grace did much more abound." "By grace are you saved, through faith, and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God." "Grace reigns through righteousness unto eternal life, by Jesus Christ our Lord." But, brethren, mercy implies sinfulness—there can be no mercy extended to the just, for justice itself secures every good thing to them. Grace too can only be for offenders. What grace is wanted by those who have kept the law and deserved well at Jehovah's hands? To them eternal life would be a matter of debt, a fairly earned reward. But when you talk of grace, you at once shut out merit and introduce another principle. Mercy can only be exercised where there is sin and grace cannot be manifested except to the undeserving. This is plain enough and yet the whole tenor of some men's religion is based on another theory.

The fact is, when we begin to study the gospel of the grace of God we see that it turns *its face always towards sin*, even as a physician looks towards disease or as charity looks towards distress. The gospel issues its invitations, but what are the invitations? Are they not addressed to those who are burdened with a load of sin and laboring to escape from its consequences? It invites every creature because every creature has its needs, but it especially says, "Let the wicked forsake his ways and the unrighteous man

his thoughts." It invites the man who has no money or in other words, no merit. It calls to those who are needy and thirsty and poor and naked, and all these are but used as figures of states produced by sin. The very *gifts* of the gospel imply sin—life is for the dead, sight is for the blind, liberty is for the captives, cleansing is for the filthy, absolution is for the sinful. No gospel blessing is proposed as a reward and no invitation is issued to those who claim the blessings of grace as a matter of right—men are invited to come and receive them freely according to the grace of God. And what are the commands of the gospel? Repent. But who repents save a sinner? Believe. But believing is not according to the law—the law speaks only of doing. Believing has to do with sinners and with the method of salvation by grace.

The gospel representations of itself usually look sinnerward. The great king who makes a feast finds not a guest to sit at the table among those who were naturally expected to come, but from the highways and hedges men are compelled to come in. If the gospel describes itself as a feast, it is a great feast for the blind, the crippled and the lame. If it describes itself as a fountain, it is a fountain opened for sin and for uncleanness. Everywhere, in all that it does and says and provides to men, the gospel proves itself to be the sinner's friend. The motto of its Founder and Lord still is, "This man receives sinners." The gospel is a hospital for the sick, none but the guilty will ever accept its benefits. It is medicine for the diseased—the whole and the self-righteous will never relish its saving draughts. Those who imagine that they have some excellence before God will never care to be saved by sovereign grace. The gospel, I say, looks sinnerward. That way, and that way only, does it cast its blessings.

And brethren, you know that the gospel has *always found its greatest trophies among the most sinful.* It enlists its best soldiers not only from amongst the guilty, but from amongst the most guilty. "Simon," said our Lord, "I have something to say unto you—A certain man had two debtors, the one owed him five hundred pence and the other fifty, and when they had nothing to pay, he frankly forgave them both. Tell me, therefore, which of them will love him most?" The gospel goes upon the principle that he who has had much forgiven the same loves much, and so its gracious Lord delights to seek out the most guilty and to manifest Himself to them with abundant and overflowing love, saying "I have blotted out your sins like a cloud, and like a thick cloud your transgressions." Among great transgressors it finds its warmest lovers. When once it has saved them, from these it receives the heartiest welcome and in them it obtains the most enthusiastic adherents. Great sinners, when saved, crown free grace with its most illustrious diadems. Well may we be sure that it has its eye towards sinners, since it is amongst the chief of sinners that it finds its highest glory.

There is one other reflection which also lies very near the surface, namely, that if the gospel does not look towards sinners, *to whom else could it look?* There seems to have been a revival lately of the old quibbling spirit, so that proud Pharisees constantly tell us that the preaching of justification by faith is overdone and that we are leading people to think less of morality by preaching up the grace of God. This often refuted objection is coming forth again because Protestantism is losing its sap and soul. The very force and backbone of the Reformers' teaching was that great doctrine of grace, that salvation is not of works, but of the grace of God alone. And because men are getting away from the Reformation and drifting into Romanism, they are casting into the background this grand truth of justification by faith alone and pretending to be afraid of it. But O, knaves and fools that most men are upon this matter! I put to all such this one question—To whom, sirs, would the gospel look if not towards sinners, for what are you but sinners? You who talk about morality being injured, about holiness being ignored, what have you to do with either? The people who usually urge these objections, as a rule, had better be quiet on such topics. In general, these fierce defenders of morality and holiness are exceedingly lax, while believers in the grace of God are frequently charged with Puritanism and rigidity. He who stands out most to speak against the doctrines of grace is frequently the man who needs grace most, while the very man who cries down good works as a ground of trust is just the person whose life is carefully directed by the statutes of the Lord. Know you, O men, that there lives not on the face of the earth a man upon whom God can look with pleasure if He consider that man on the ground of His law. "They are all gone out of the way, they are altogether become unprofitable; there is none that does good, no not one." Not one heart is sound and right before God by nature. Not one life is pure and clean when the Lord comes to examine it with His all-searching eye. We are all shut up in the same prison as all guilty—if not alike guilty, yet guilty according to the proportion of our light and knowledge and each one justly condemned, for we have erred in heart and have not loved the Lord. To whom, then, could the gospel look if it did

not cast its eyes sinnerward? For whom else could the Savior have died? Who is there in the world for whom the benefits of grace could be designed?

II. Secondly, THE MORE CLOSELY WE LOOK, THE MORE CLEAR THIS FACT BECOMES, for, brethren, *the work of salvation was certainly not performed for any of us who are saved on account of any goodness in us.* If there is any goodness in us, it was put there by the grace of God and it certainly was not there when first the heart of Jehovah's love began to move towards us. If you take the first sign of salvation that was actually visible on earth, namely, the coming of Christ, we are told concerning it that, "When we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly. For scarcely for a righteous man will one die: yet perhaps for a good man some would even dare to die. But God commends His love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." So that our redemption, my brethren, was effected before we were born. This was the fruit of the Father's great love, "wherewith He loved us, even when we were dead in sins." There was nothing in us going before which could have merited that redemption, indeed the very idea of meriting the death of Jesus is absurd and blasphemous. Yes, and when we were living in sin and loving it, there were preparations made for our salvation—divine love was busy on our behalf when we were busy in rebellion. The gospel was brought near to us. Earnest hearts were set praying for us. The text was written which would convert us and as I have already said, the blood was spilt which cleanses us and the Spirit of God was given who should renew us. All this was done while as yet we had no breathings of soul after God. Is not that a wonderful passage in Ezekiel where the Lord passed by and saw the helpless infant cast out in the open field while it was yet unswaddled and unwashed and was foul and polluted in its own blood? He says that it was a time of love and yet it was a time of pollution and loathing. He did not love the chosen baby because it was well-washed and fitly clad, but He loved it when it was foul and naked. Let every believing heart admire the freeness and compassion of divine love—

*"He saw me ruined in the fall,
Yet loved me, notwithstanding all.
He saved me from my lost estate,
His loving-kindness, oh, how great!"*

When your heart was hard, when your neck was obstinate, when you would not repent nor yield to Him, but rebelled yet more and more, He loved you, even you, with supreme affection. Why such grace? Why, indeed, but because His nature is full of goodness and He delights in mercy. Is not mercy seen to be evidently extended towards the sinful and not exerted because of some goodness moving thereto?

Look a little closer still. *What did our Lord come into the world to do?* Here is the answer. "He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon Him; and with His stripes we are healed." He came that He might be a sin-bearer—and do you think He came to bear only the little, trifling sins of the best sort of men, if such sins there are? Do you suppose that He is a little Savior who came to save us from little offenses? Beloved, it is Jehovah's darling Son that comes to earth and bears the load of sin, a load which, when He bears it, He finds to be no fictitious burden, for it forces from Him bloody sweat. So heavy is that load that He bows His head to the grave and even unto death beneath it. That stupendous load which lay on Christ was the heap of our sins and hence as we look into the subject, we perceive that the gospel must have to do with sinners. No sin! Then the cross is a mistake. No sin! Then the "*Lama Sabachthani*" was a just complaint against unnecessary cruelty. No sin! Then, O Redeemer, what are those glories which we have so eagerly ascribed to You? How can You put away sin which does not exist? The existence of great sin is implied in the coming of Christ and that coming was occasioned and rendered necessary by sin, against which Jesus comes as our Deliverer. He declares that He has opened a fountain, filled with the blood of His own veins. But what for? A cleansing fountain implies filth. It must be, sinner, that somewhere or other there are filthy people or else there had not been such an amazing fountain as this, filled from the heart of Christ. If you are guilty, you are one who needs the fountain, and it is opened for you. Come with all your sin and foulness about you and wash this morning, and be clean.—

*"'Twas for sinners that He suffered
Agonies unspeakable.
Can you doubt you are a sinner?
If you can—then hope, farewell.
But, believing what is written—*

*'All are guilty'—'dead in sin,'
Looking to the Crucified One
Hope shall rise your soul within.'*

Brethren, *all the gifts which Jesus Christ* came to give, or at least most of them, imply that there is sin. What is His first gift but pardon? How can He pardon a man who has not transgressed? With all reverence do I speak, there can be no such thing as pardon where there is no offense committed. Propitiation for sin and blotting out of iniquity both require that there must be sin to be blotted out or what is there real about them? Christ comes to bring justification and this shows that there must be a lack of natural holiness in men, for if not, they would be justified by themselves and by their own works. And why all this outcry about justification by the righteousness of the Son of God if men are already justified by a righteousness of their own? Those two blessings, and others of the same kind, are clearly applicable only to sinful men. To no other men can they be of any use.

Our Lord Jesus Christ came *girded also with divine power*. He says, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me." To what end was He girded with divine power unless it was because sin had taken all power and strength from man and man was in a condition out of which he could not be lifted except by the energy of the eternal Spirit? And what does this imply but that Christ's errand bears upon those who through sin are without strength and without merit before God? The Holy Spirit is given because man's spirit has failed, because sin has taken the life out of man and made him dead in trespasses and sins—therefore the Holy Spirit comes to quicken him into newness of life, and that Spirit comes by Jesus Christ. Therefore, the errand of Jesus Christ is manifestly to the guilty.

I will not omit to say that *the great deeds of our Lord*, if you look at them carefully, all bear upon sinners. Jesus lives—it is that He may seek and save that which is lost. Jesus dies—it is that He may make a propitiation for the sins of guilty men. Jesus rises—He rises again for our justification and as I have shown, we would not need justification unless we had been naturally guilty. Jesus ascends on high and He receives gifts for men, but note that special word, "Yes, for the rebellious also that the Lord God may dwell among them." Jesus lives in heaven, but He lives there to intercede. "Therefore He is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by Him, seeing He ever lives to make intercession for them." So take whatever part of His glorious achievements you please and you will find that there is a distinct bearing towards those who are immersed in guilt.

And beloved, *all the gifts and blessings that Jesus Christ has brought to us derive much of their radiance from their bearing upon sinners*. It is in Christ Jesus that we are elect and to my mind, the glory of electing love lies in this, that it pitched upon such undeserving objects. How had there been any election had it been according to merit? Then men would have taken rank by right according to their own deeds, but election's glories are brilliant with grace and grace always has for its foil and background the unworthiness of the objects towards whom it is manifested. The election of God is not according to our works, but it is a gracious election of sinners. Adore and wonder.

Turn to effectual calling and see how delightful it is to view that calling as a calling from among the dead, as a calling of the things that are not as though they were, as a calling of condemned ones into forgiveness and favor. Turn next to adoption. What is the glory of adoption, but that God has adopted those who were strangers and rebels to make them His children? What is the peculiar beauty of regeneration but that He has been able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham? What is the beauty of sanctification, but that He has taken such unholy creatures as we are to make us kings and priests unto God and to sanctify us wholly—spirit, soul, and body? To my mind it is the glory of heaven to think that yonder white-robed choristers were once foully deified—those happy worshippers were once rebels against God. It is a happy sight to see the unfallen angels who have kept their first estate perfectly pure and forever praising God, but the vision of fallen men divinely restored is more full of the glory of God. Lift, as they may, their joyful voices in perpetual chorales, the angels can never reach the special sweetness of that song, "We have washed our robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb." They cannot experientially enter into that truth which is of Jehovah's name its crowning glory, "You were slain and have redeemed us to God by Your blood."

Thus I have abundantly shown that the further we look, the more clear it is that the gospel is aimed at sinners and especially intended for their benefit.

III. Now, thirdly, it is evident that IT IS OUR WISDOM TO ACCEPT THE SITUATION. I know that to many this is a very unpalatable doctrine. Well, friend, you had better have your palate altered, for you will never be able to alter the doctrine. It is the truth of the everlasting God and cannot be changed. The very best thing you can do, since the gospel looks towards sinners, is to get where the gospel looks and I can recommend this to you, not merely on the ground of policy, but on the ground of honesty, because *you will be only in your right place* when you get there. I think I hear you raising objections. "I do not admire this system. Am I to be saved in the same way as the dying thief?" Precisely so, sir, unless there should happen to be even more grace shown towards you than to him. "But you do not mean to assert that in the matter of salvation I am to be put on a level with the woman that was a sinner? I have been pure and chaste and am I to owe my salvation just as much to the absolute mercy of God as she did?" Yes, sir, I do say that, exactly as it stands. There is but one principle upon which the Lord saves men and it is that of pure grace. I want you to understand this. Even if it grinds like grit between your teeth and makes you angry, I shall not regret it so long as you know what I mean, for the truth may yet find entrance into your soul and you may yet bow before its power. Oh, you children of godly parents, you young people of excellent morals and delicate consciences, to you I speak, even to you. Rejoice in your privileges, but do not boast in them, for you too have sinned. You have sinned against light and knowledge. You know you have. If you have not plunged into the grosser sins in act and deed, yet in desire and in imagination you have gone far enough astray and in many things you have offended grievously against God. If, with these considerations before you, you take your place as a sinner, you will not be disgraced, but be merely standing where you certainly are.

And then remember, if you get the blessing this way, you will have obtained it in *the safest possible way*. Suppose there are a number of guest chambers and I have my seat in one of the best of them. I may have no right to be there. I am eating and drinking of what is provided for superior guests, but my ticket does not mark me out as one of these and therefore I am ill at ease. Every mouthful that I eat I think to myself, "I do not know whether I shall be allowed to remain here. Perhaps the Lord of the feast will come in and say to me, 'Friend, how came you in here?' and I must begin with shame to take the lowest room." Brethren, when we begin at the bottom and sit in the lowest room, we feel safe. We are satisfied that what we do get is meant for us and will not be taken away from us. Perhaps also when the king comes, he may take us up to a higher room. There is nothing like beginning in the lowest place. When I lay hold of the promise as a saint, I have my doubts about it, but when I grasp it as a sinner, I can have no question. If the Lord bids me feed on His mercy as His child, I do it, but the devil whispers that I am presuming, that I never was really adopted by grace—but when I come to Jesus as a guilty, undeserving sinner, and take what the Lord freely presents to me upon believing, the devil himself cannot tell me that I am not a sinner, or if he does, the lie is too transparent and causes me no distress. There is nothing like having an indefeasible title—and if the description given to you in the title is that you are a sinner, it is an indisputable one, for depend upon it, you are a sinner. So the sinner's place is your true place and your safest place.

Another blessing is, it is *a place into which you can get directly*, even at this very moment. If the gospel looks towards men in a certain state of heart in which there are commendable virtues, then how long will it take me to raise my heart to that state? If Jesus Christ comes into the world to save men who have a certain measure of excellence, then how long will it take me to obtain that excellence? I may be taken sick and die within the next thirty minutes and hear the sentence of eternal judgment, and it would be a poor gospel to tell me that I might possibly obtain salvation if I attained a state which would take me several months to reach. At this hour I, a dying man, do know that I may be gone out of this world and beyond the reach of mercy within an hour—what a comfort it is that the gospel comes to me and gives itself to me just now, even as it finds me! I am already in that position in which grace begins with men, for I am a sinner and I have only to admit that I am so. Now then, poor soul, just sit down before the Lord and say, "Lord, does Your Son come to save the guilty? I am such and I trust Him to save me. Did He die for the ungodly? I am such, Lord, I trust in His blood to cleanse me. Was His death for sinners? Lord, I take up the position. I plead guilty. I accept the sentence of Your law as being just, but save me, Lord, for Jesus died." It is done. You are saved. Go in peace, my son. Your sins, which are many, are forgiven you. Go, my daughter, go your way and rejoice. The Lord has put away your sin—you shall not die, for he that believes is justified from all sin. Blessed is the man to whom the Lord im-

putes not iniquity and in whose spirit there is no guile. Get, then, into your true position—accept the situation in which grace considers you to be. Do not talk of justice and merit, but appeal to pity and love. A certain man had several times plotted against the first Napoleon and eventually, being entirely in the emperor's hands, the sentence of death was pronounced upon him. His daughter earnestly pleaded for his life and at last, having obtained an audience with the Emperor, she fell upon her knees before him. "My girl," said the emperor, "it is of no use to plead for your father, for I have the clearest evidence of his repeated crimes and it is but justice that he should die." The girl replied, "Sire, I do not ask for justice, I beg for mercy. It is upon the mercifulness of your heart and not upon the justice of the case that I rely." She was heard patiently and her father's life was spared at her request. Imitate this appeal and cry, "Have mercy upon me, O God, according to Your loving-kindness." Justice owes you nothing but death—mercy alone can spare you. Have done with every idea of making out a good case—admit it to be a bad one and plead guilty. Cast yourself upon the mercy of the court and ask for mercy, free mercy, undeserved mercy, gratuitous favor. This is what you must ask for and as in law they have a form of suing called *in forma pauperis*, that is, in the form of a pauper, do you adopt the method, and as a man full of necessities do you beg for favor at the hands of God, *in forma pauperis*, and it shall be bestowed upon you.

IV. Now I close this discourse with the next point, which is, THIS DOCTRINE HAS A GREAT SANCTIFYING INFLUENCE. "There," says one, "I do not believe that. Surely you have been holding out a premium to sin by saying that Christ came to save nobody but sinners and does not call anybody to repentance but the sinful." My dear sirs, I have heard all that sort of talk so many times that I know it by heart—the same objections were raised against this doctrine in Luther's day by the Papists and since then by workmongers of all classes. There is nothing substantial in their notion that free grace is opposed to morality—it is only their fancy. They dream that the doctrine of justification by faith will lead to sin, but it can be proved by history that whenever this doctrine has been best preached, men have become most holy. And whenever this truth has been darkened, all manner of corruption has abounded. Gracious doctrine and gracious living fitly go together—and legal teaching and unlawful living are generally found associated.

Let us show you the sanctifying power of this gospel. Its first operation in that direction is this—when the Holy Spirit brings the truth of free pardon home to a man, *it completely changes his thoughts concerning God*. "What," says he, "has God freely forgiven me all my offenses for Christ's sake? And does He love me notwithstanding all my sin? I did not know He was such a one as this, so gracious and kind! I thought He was hard. I called Him a tyrant, gathering where He had not strewed—but does He feel towards me like this? Then," says the soul, "I love Him in return." There is a complete reversal of feeling—the man is turned right round as soon as he understands redeeming grace and dying love. Conversion follows on a sight of grace.

Moreover, this grand truth does more than turn a man, it *inspires, melts, enlivens, and inflames him*. This is a truth which stirs the deeps of the heart and fills the man with lively emotions. You talked to him about doing good and about right and justice and reward and punishment and he heard it all and it may have had a measure of influence over him, but he did not deeply feel it. Such teaching is too cold to warm the heart. The truth which comes home to the man appears to him to be new and exciting. It runs like this—God, out of His free mercy, forgives the guilty and He has forgiven you. Why, this awakens him, stirs him up, touches the fountain of his tears, and moves his whole being. Perhaps at the first hearing of the gospel, he does not care for it and even hates it, but when it comes with power, it obtains a wonderful mastery over him. When he really receives its message as his own, then his cold heart of stone is turned to flesh. Warm emotion, tender love, humble desire, and a sacred longing after the Lord are all excited in his bosom. The quickening power of this divine truth, as well as the converting power of it, can never be too much admired.

Besides, this truth, when it enters the heart, *deals a deadly blow at the man's self-conceit*. Many a man would have become wise only he thought he was so already. And many a man would have been virtuous, only he concluded that he had already attained thereto. Behold, this doctrine smites upon the skull all confidence in your own goodness and makes you feel your guilt, and in so doing, it removes the great evil of pride. A sense of sin is the very threshold of mercy. A consciousness of shortcoming, a grief because of past offenses, are necessary preparations for a higher and a nobler life. The gospel digs

out the foundation, makes a great vacuum, and so makes room to lay in their places the glorious stones of a noble spiritual character.

Moreover, where this truth is received there is sure to spring up in the soul *a sense of gratitude*. The man who has had much forgiven will be sure to love much in return. Gratitude to God is a grand mainspring for holy action. Those who do right in order to be rewarded for it are acting selfishly. Selfishness is at the bottom of their character—they abstain from sin only lest self should suffer—and they obey only that self may be safe and happy. The man who does right, not because of heaven or hell, but because God has saved him and he loves the God who saved him, is the truly right-loving man. He who loves right because God loves right, has risen out of the bog of selfishness and is capable of the loftiest virtue, yes, he has in him a living spring which will well up and flow forth in holy living so long as he exists.

And dear brethren, I think you will all see that free forgiveness to sinners is very conducive towards one part of a true character, namely, *readiness to forgive others*, for he who has been forgiven much himself is the very man who finds it easy to pass by the transgressions of others. If he does not so, he may well doubt whether he has been himself forgiven, but if the Lord has blotted out his debt of a thousand talents, he will readily enough forgive the hundred pence which his brother owes him.

Last of all, some of us know and we wish that all knew by personal experience, that a sense of undeserved favor and free forgiveness is *the very soul of enthusiasm*—and enthusiasm is to Christianity what the lifeblood is to the body. Were you ever made enthusiastic by a cold discourse upon the excellence of morality? Did you ever feel your soul stirred within you by listening to a sermon upon the rewards of virtue? Were you ever made enthusiastic by being told of the punishments of the law? No, sirs, but preach up the doctrines of grace, let the free favor of God be extolled, and mark the consequences. There are people who will walk for many miles and stand without weariness by the hour together to hear this. I have known them labor many a weary mile to listen to this doctrine. What for? Because the man was eloquent or because he put it well? Not so. It has sometimes been badly spoken and in uncouth language—and yet this doctrine has always awakened the people. There is something in the soul of man that is looking out for the gospel of grace and when it comes, there is a hungering to hear about it. Look at the Reformation times, when death was the penalty of listening to a sermon—how the people crowded at midnight. How they journeyed into the deserts and the caves to listen to the teaching of these grand old truths. There is sweetness about mercy, divine mercy, freely given, which holds the ear of man and stirs his heart. When this truth enters the soul, it breeds zealots, martyrs, confessors, missionaries, saints. If any Christians are in earnest and full of love to God and man, they are those who know what grace has done for them. If any remain under reproaches faithful, under losses and crosses joyful, they are those who are conscious of their indebtedness to divine love. If any delight in God while they live and rest in Him as they die, they are the men who know that they are justified by faith in Jesus Christ who justifies the ungodly. All glory be to the Lord who lifts the beggar from the dunghill and sets him among princes, even the princes of His people. He takes the very cast-offs of the world and adopts them into His family and makes them heirs of God by Jesus Christ. The Lord give us all to know the power of the gospel upon our sinful selves. The Lord endear to us the name, work, and person of the Sinner's Friend. May we never forget the hole of the pit from where we were drawn, nor the hand which rescued us, nor the undeserved kindness which moved that hand. Henceforth let us have more and more to say of infinite grace. "Free grace and dying love." Well does the old song say, "Ring those charming bells." Free grace and dying love—the sinner's windows of hope! Our hearts exult in the very words. Glory be unto You, O Lord Jesus, ever full of compassion. Amen.

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